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ABSTRACT

While national trends in liberal arts course offerings in community colleges have been charted for many years, trends in non-liberal courses have not been similarly mapped. In an effort to gain a better understanding of the entire community college curriculum, the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC), in Los Angeles, California, augmented its 1991 study of the liberal arts with a study of non-liberal arts, using data from the same 164 community colleges. Non-liberal arts courses were counted and categorized using spring 1991 class schedules for the 164 participating colleges. Excluding laboratory courses, which were not included in the CSCC tally, 43.3% of the spring 1991 community college curriculum was devoted to the non-liberal arts. These classes were grouped into the following 10 course categories: business and office (24.6% of all courses); personal skills (19.1%); trade and industry (18.6%); technical education (18.1%); health occupations (10.2%); marketing and distribution (3.4%); education (2.5%); engineering technology (2%); agriculture (1.2%); and home economics (0.2%). The low percentage for home economics courses was due to the grouping of classes such as pattern design and culinary arts in the "trade and industry" category. A number of two-year college courses combine both liberal arts and non-liberal arts subject matters, such as those providing literacy skills in occupational courses, or truly interdisciplinary courses integrating two separate subject areas. (PAA)

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DESCRIBING THE NON-LIBERAL ARTS COMMUNITY COLLEGE CURRICULUM

by Jan Ignash

The community college curriculum reflects the diverse aims of approximately 1,250 institutions. Courses are offered in the liberal arts, in occupational subjects, in community service interest areas ranging from CPR to origami, in literacy, in adult education, and in special contract programs with business and industry. While trends in the liberal arts have been charted for as long as 16 years (Cohen and Ignash, 1992; Cohen and Brawer, 1987; Lewis and Farris, 1990), trends in other areas have not received the same attention. A recent study of non-liberal arts credit courses by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges (CSCC) has attempted to rectify this omission.

This digest presents the results of the 1992 "Non-Liberal Arts Curriculum Study." While dividing the curriculum into neat "packets" of liberal arts versus non-liberal arts courses is necessary to measure curriculum in each area, these tidy divisions do not hold entirely true in real life. The final portion of this article comments on several "integrated curricula," which combine both liberal arts and non-liberal arts subject areas.

The 1992 CSCC Non-Liberal Arts Study

In order to gain a better understanding of the entire community college credit curriculum, the CSCC augmented its 1991 study of the liberal arts (Cohen and Ignash, 1992) with a study of the non-liberal arts, using data from the same random sample of 164 community colleges. In the seven liberal arts studies conducted by the CSCC since 1975, the liberal arts have been divided into six major discipline areas: humanities, English, fine and performing arts, social sciences, mathematics and computer sciences, and the hard sciences. A comparable taxonomy of the non-liberal arts was established at the CSCC, based largely upon the subject area divisions used by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education. To determine the ratio of liberal arts to non-liberal arts, the new study used the same college course schedules from which the liberal arts course offerings were tallied.

How Much of the Curriculum Is Not Liberal Arts?

In spring 1991, 43.4% of the community college curriculum was devoted to the non-liberal arts. The way in which the study tallied course sections is pertinent to this finding. In none of the studies undertaken by the CSCC were laboratory classes included. Also, a course had to list a meeting time and place in order to be tallied, therefore cooperative education, apprenticeship, clinicals, practicums, field experience, and independent study courses were also excluded. Since laboratory classes occur with greater frequency in many non-liberal arts subject areas, such as automotive or nursing programs, their omission may at least partially account for the lower percentage of non-liberal arts courses.

What Are the Non-Liberal Arts?

The CSCC study found that four categories accounted for slightly more than 80% of all non-liberal arts courses. "Business and office" courses were by far the largest category of non-liberal arts course offerings -- occupying a full 24.6% of the total non-liberal arts curriculum. This category included courses in accounting, taxes, business and management, secretarial classes such as typing, shorthand, and filing, legal assistant and other business courses such as airline ticketing and reservations. The "personal skills" category was the second largest grouping of courses, accounting for 19.1% of all non-liberal arts courses. Physical education accounted for the lion's share of courses under this category, although courses such as freshman orientation, introduction to the library, parenting, career and life planning and self-appraisal were also included. The third largest category was "trade and industry," at 18.6%, and included construction, automotive, surveying and drafting, CAD/CAM, other mechanics and repairers, transport and materials moving, cosmetology, and hospitality industry courses. The fourth largest category (18.1%) was "technical education"; computer software applications courses accounted for the largest portion of courses coded under this category. Other courses included in "technical education" were protective services (fire, police, law enforcement, and military science), journalism, other mass media, and graphics and commercial photography.

Six other areas accounted for the approximately 20% of all other non-liberal arts courses: health occupations (10.2%); marketing and distribution (3.4%); education (2.5%); engineering technology (2.0%); agriculture, including floriculture and agribusiness (1.2%); and home economics (.2%).

Why Were There So Few Courses In Some Categories?

A few of these findings bear comment. A small number of "true" home economics courses were found, as many sewing and tailoring, food preparation and food preservation, and interior decorating courses were more oriented toward providing training for students in consumer service areas than toward providing skills to be used in the home. Only courses in baking, cooking and sewing for one's personal use *at home* were included under "home economics." Classes such as pattern design, fabrics, wines, culinary arts, and refrigeration for restaurants were often clearly "trade and industry" classes as judged by both course titles and course descriptions. Nutrition classes were often judged to be appropriately coded under "health," while parenting classes were coded under "personal

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and avocational skills." Using this taxonomy, then, the category "home economics" all but disappeared.

Education was another category which accounted for only a small percentage (2.5%) of the non-liberal arts curriculum. While community colleges tend to offer courses in such areas as early childhood education and physical education instructor training, four-year institutions are the traditional teacher-training colleges and education courses are not often found in community colleges. Two other areas, "agriculture" and "engineering technology," also accounted for small proportions of the non-liberal arts curriculum (1.2% and 2.0%, respectively). The reason for this lies partly in the fact that courses in these two areas that were considered more *science*-oriented were coded as liberal arts. Even when the results of the liberal arts and the non-liberal arts studies are added together, however, neither engineering nor agriculture accounts for a sizeable percentage of the community college curriculum.

The In-Between Zone

The CSCC has been tracking trends in the liberal arts since 1975, and this non-liberal arts study establishes a baseline for future studies of this area of the curriculum. A gray area, however, remains relatively uncharted. Some community colleges offer "integrated (or interdisciplinary) courses," in which both the liberal arts and non-liberal arts subject matters are taught. Because of their innovative nature in providing education to community college students, these courses bear special comment.

In general, community colleges have developed two types of integrated courses. The first type focuses on providing literacy or mathematics skills in occupational courses, while the second combines a regular liberal arts area such as history or biology with occupational subject matter. Examples of the first type include San Jose City College's Applied Mathematics for Electronics, the Auto Literacy Program at Yuba College in Marysville, California, and College Skills for Health Occupations Students offered at Santa Rosa Junior College (Evaluation and Training Institute, 1991).

The second type of integrated course is truly interdisciplinary in nature, in that it combines regular content from two different subject areas. Examples of this type of integrated course include Oceans, an Oregon community college multidisciplinary course in humanities, technology, and science which is required for all students in occupational fields; Living with Technology, a California community college course giving an introduction to the history and concepts of technology; and The Worker in America, The Individual and Technology, and Modern Business Ethics, offered at Illinois community colleges.

Both in content and instructional methods used, these courses tend to emphasize working with others, solving problems, making decisions, and adapting to changes in the workplace (Cox and Pecorino, 1990). The Community College Humanities Association cites the ability to make value judgments, to contribute to human development and understanding, and to appreciate the variety of human purposes as among the benefits to students who complete integrated courses (Community College Humanities Association, 1991). A study of Kirkwood Community College's efforts to integrate humanities and vocational education subject matter cites improved faculty cooperation and appreciation as additional benefits of integrated curricula, since faculty must work side-by-side in developing such courses and programs (Sessions, 1992).

While it is often difficult for community college educators to find the resources and expertise necessary to develop integrated curricula, enough examples of such courses exist to indicate that efforts are being made to provide students with opportunities to experience interdisciplinary courses.

Conclusion

Studies like the CSCC's non-liberal arts study provide an indication of curricular trends. But the purpose of these studies is not merely descriptive. Current research at the CSCC is focusing on relating these trends in the curriculum to information on student and course transfer rates and minority student enrollments. Descriptions of the total community college curriculum, combined with information on student populations and transfer rates, can provide a more complete picture of the kind of education taking place in community colleges -- information which may tell us which curricula are effective for various purposes.

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